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ABSTRACT

In 1977, a task force on teaching evaluation was formed at the University of California to recommend means of implementing reliable, flexible and effective teaching evaluation for the improvement of teaching and the consideration of teaching in personnel actions. Surveys of faculty and department chairs revealed strong support for colleague evaluation including colleague observation and colleague review of course materials. A number of guidelines for the use of colleague evaluation are discussed to ensure fairness in the use of colleague evaluation for personnel actions. A distinction is made between the use of evaluations primarily for improvement and the use of personnel actions. (Author)

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Symposium: Diversifying the Evidence for Evaluating University teaching: A Faculty Mandate

Evaluation By Colleagues

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In 1977, a task force on teaching evaluation was formed at the University of California to recommend means of implementing reliable, flexible and effective teaching evaluation for the improvement of teaching and the consideration of teaching in personnel actions. In the following two years the Task Force conducted a series of interviews on each of the nine campuses and a questionnaire survey of faculty and department chairs. The Task Force report, including recommendations, the results of the surveys and interviews and a handbook of suggested procedures for evaluating teaching was published in February 1980.[1]

Survey Results

The surveys conducted by the Task Force found that faculty and department chairs felt there has been too great a reliance on student end-of-course evaluations. Fully 83 percent of faculty and 59 percent of the chairs surveyed indicated that they felt departments should consider a greater variety of evidence about the quality of teaching.[2]

TABLE 1

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
Faculty: Departments should consider a greater variety of kinds and sources of evidence about the quality of teaching than at present.	26%	57%	15%	2%
	83%		17%	
Chairs: Personnel files should include a greater variety of kinds and sources of evidence about the quality of teaching than is presently the case.	16%	43%	34%	7%
	59%		41%	

1. Report of the Task For Teaching Evaluation, The University of California, February 1980.

2. Among faculty there were essentially no differences by rank, department or campus in the expression of this opinion, and only minor differences were found among chairs (e.g., fine arts and physical sciences gave relatively less support while chairs in the professional fields gave relatively more).

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To assess the types of evaluations faculty might consider useful, we asked them to evaluate 21 kinds of evaluation evidence in terms of their usefulness in making judgements about the quality of a faculty member's teaching. While every one of the 21 kinds of information was thought to be useful by a majority of faculty, the seven items which dealt with colleagues as a source of evaluations ranked high among the twenty-one in perceived usefulness.

TABLE 2

Information from Colleagues

Faculty: Please indicate how useful it would be for you to have each kind of information in making judgements about the quality of the faculty member's teaching.

Chairs: Please indicate how useful it would be to have each kind of information on documenting the teaching portion of the (personnel) file.

	ITEM	definitely useful	probably useful	total useful
III-f	colleague observations in consultative and clinical setting			
	Faculty	31%	52%	83%
	Chairs	48%	39%	87%
III-g*	analysis of course materials, including syllabus, assignments, readings, and examination by colleagues who know the field.			
	Faculty	36%	46%	82%
	Chairs	41%	40%	81%
III-p	information from TAs who have assisted the faculty member and whose anonymity can be preserved:			
	Faculty	29%	53%	82%
	Chairs	41%	45%	86%
III-s	colleague observations of presentation in colloquia or professional setting:			
	Faculty	28%	53%	81%
	Chairs	35%	48%	83%
III-o	record of attracting high quality students to an academic or clinical program or course:			
	Faculty	29%	49%	78%
	Chairs	42%	42%	84%
III-q	colleague assessments of the quality of students' scholarly work or professional skills			
	Faculty	21%	50%	71%
	Chairs	31%	46%	77%

*Roman numerals and letter alongside each item refer to its place in the original questionnaire. Items are rank ordered by "Total Useful" percentage on faculty surveys.

In addition when faculty were asked to select the three types of evaluation evidence which would be most useful in assessing undergraduate teaching, "colleague analysis of course materials" and "colleague evaluation via classroom observation" were second and third, respectively in the number of faculty nominating them as useful.

TABLE 3

Percent of Faculty Nominating Certain Evaluation Methods As "Most Useful" for Assessing Undergraduate Teaching

Method	Percent of:	
	faculty	chairs
statistical summaries of student evaluations	33	53
colleague analysis of course materials	32	19
colleague classroom observation	25	31
representative student comments from evaluations	24	42

This evidence from the faculty survey indicates quite strong support for colleague evaluations in general, and classroom visitation in particular. Yet this attitude was not anticipated by administrators and key faculty involved in the personnel process who had been interviewed prior to the conduct of the survey. These interviews revealed that colleague evaluations were not gathered systematically on any of the campuses and that there was some expectation that faculty would resist the implementation of such procedures.

To be sure, faculty reactions to the implementation of colleague evaluation and classroom visitation depends significantly on the manner in which such evaluation procedures are implemented. To encourage faculty and department chairs to consider developing new methods of colleague evaluation, sections on colleague evaluation were included in a handbook of procedures for evaluating teaching which was made part of the Task Force report. The handbook was designed to be suggestive rather than prescriptive, but particular attention was given to suggest steps, considerations and cautionary notes for each method and to consider the use of the methods in terms of evaluation for improvement and evaluation for use in the personnel process.

Guidelines: Colleague Observation

When colleague observation is undertaken as part of the review process it is important to establish procedures which are both systematic and fair. The number of colleagues selected to make independent observations needs to be sufficient to ensure an unbiased and balanced appraisal. Colleagues selected to observe should have knowledge of the course content and a reputation for being fair. The number and timing of classroom visits needs

careful consideration. In the typical lecture class, two visits by each colleague would be sufficient. If a variety of teaching methods is used, (e.g., lecture, discussion, student presentations, laboratory) it would be very difficult to choose one or two class sessions which would be typical. In some small classes the presence of an observer may be more distracting. The faculty member being evaluated should be included in deliberations regarding the logistics of classroom visitation.

It is important to have a set of explicit criteria by which colleagues make their evaluations. For colleagues observing strictly for evaluation purposes, the criteria help to guide the observations. For colleagues who have ongoing contact (such as in team taught courses) they help to summarize the impressions developed over numerous observations. The criteria selected should reflect aspects of teaching which have broad departmental consensus and for which faculty observers would be in the best position to provide information. For example, faculty observers should not be asked to comment on the instructors availability outside of class if this has not been directly observed, nor should they comment on student satisfaction. Aspects of teaching on which colleagues might be asked to comment include the instructor's coverage of a topic, appropriateness of the teaching strategy, student participation.

Feedback to the faculty member is important if the evaluations are to have any usefulness for the improvement of teaching, but problems of confidentiality need to be taken into consideration when these evaluations are to be used as part of the personnel process. Where colleague evaluation is strictly for improvement purposes greater flexibility and informality in methods is possible. A review of a videotape with a colleague might be helpful in providing supportive and constructive suggestions for improvement.

In discussing colleague observation, at least brief mention should be made of evaluation by teaching assistants. Teaching assistants are in a unique position to provide information about teaching. They have many opportunities to observe and they are in contact with students throughout the course. Nevertheless, TAs are in a difficult and vulnerable position as graduate students in the department and as employees. Therefore evaluation of faculty by TAs was not specifically recommended by the Task Force unless both TAs and faculty feel confident about the procedures and anonymity of the individual TAs can be preserved. This usually means collecting evaluations by several TAs over a period of time before employing them in the personnel process of summarizing them for faculty feedback.

Guidelines for Colleague Evaluation of Instructional Materials

There are many ways in which faculty can provide information on their teaching which can contribute to the evaluation process. One area which received considerable support from faculty and departmental chairs in our survey was the submission of course materials such as the syllabus, assignments, readings and examinations. Over 80 percent of faculty and chairs thought such information would be useful in evaluating an individual's teaching.

If faculty begin to submit course materials as part of their dossier, colleagues will necessarily be involved in reviewing and evaluating these materials. It is important that colleagues included in such reviews be qualified to review the materials and that the definition of who is qualified

to review be considered separately for individual courses. Qualified individuals need not be limited to the faculty member's own department. A minimum of three colleagues should independently review the materials according to a specified set of criteria developed into a checklist rating form or set of questions. These criteria should be developed at the departmental level, taking into consideration the special features of courses taught in the department. Criteria which might be used include how the submitted materials reflect the instructor's:

- knowledge of recent developments
- coverage of basic concepts
- attempts to challenge or stimulate students intellectually
- choice of appropriate instructional materials
- clarity and appropriateness of course goals or objectives
- efforts to provide meaningful organization of content
- effective evaluation procedures
- efforts to provide students with constructive feedback

If such evaluation is to lead to self improvement it is important that instructors be provided with feedback and yet these evaluations must be conducted confidentially. A summary of the evaluations by the chair or departmental committee could be communicated to the faculty member while preserving the confidentiality of individual reviewers.

Summary and Overview

The study of the evaluation of teaching at the University of California revealed that there is considerable interest among faculty and department chairs in diversifying the kinds and sources of evaluation which are utilized. Although administrators tend to be guarded about the faculty's willingness to include colleague evaluation and classroom visitation in the evaluation process, there is wide faculty support for such colleague observation and evaluation, exceeded only by the degree of support for use of systematic interviews or surveys with graduating students or alumni. Given this broad base of support among faculty, it is important to provide faculty with some information and guidelines regarding the use of colleague evaluation so that the procedures developed are relevant to the evaluation of teaching and carried out in a manner which provides for the unique contributions colleagues can make to the evaluation process. It would be hoped that such procedures would not only contribute to the faculty's confidence in the evaluation process but also to the positive development of colleagial relationships in encouraging mutual assistance and support in the improvement of teaching.